

Minister Cele is losing the war on crime

By Andrew Whitfield MP – DA Shadow Minister of Police

Chairperson,

I would like to begin by extending my heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims of last weekend's horrific violence in Phillipi. May their souls rest in peace.

I'd like to begin by thanking the many honest and hardworking police officers across our country who serve with professionalism and pride. These brave men and women go to work every day to make South Africa a safer place to live for all of us and we owe them our appreciation.

I would also like to thank the thousands of dedicated members of community policing forums and neighbourhood watches who give up their time to keep their communities safe against overwhelming odds. I'd also like to extend my gratitude to our police reservists who volunteer to put their lives on the line but who are consistently underappreciated.

Chairperson, South Africa is made up of many good, honest and hardworking South Africans who want to build a safer country for all, whether they are volunteers, warrant officers or book keepers in the local police station.

The problem, Chairperson, is that there are not enough of them and the ones that do exist are not recognised, nurtured and rewarded for their efforts.

Last week, the National Police Commissioner told this committee that the current policing ratio in South Africa is one officer to every 383 citizens whereas the UN standard is 1:220.

According to this ratio SAPS is currently under resourced by more than 64 000 police officers.

Earlier this week the Minister said that SAPS was not losing the war on crime. However, in January this year the Police Commissioner went on the record here in Parliament to say that SAPS is so inadequately resourced that it is impossible to fulfil its mandate.

In spite of this alarming mixed messaging coming out of Pretoria once all is said and done here this evening, this budget debate will ultimately find expression in communities like Bethelsdorp in Port Elizabeth and Arcadia in Humansdorp who are being held hostage by rampant gang violence.

It is these communities, like many others, who feel the lack of visible policing and boots on the ground when this Parliament and the Minister do not do their jobs.

While inadequate police resourcing affects communities across our country, it is a fact that it affects some provinces and precincts more than it does others.

In the Western Cape last year for example, half of all murders were recorded at only 13% of police stations and half of all murders in the Metro take place in just 5 police precincts. Murder in Philippi East precinct has increased by 180% over the five-year period from 2013/14 to 17/18, and by 36.7% in the last financial year.

Yet over the past two years, the Western Cape Provincial ratio has deteriorated from one police officer to every 385 people, down to one police officer to every 509 people. In the last four years 4 500 police officers have been lost to the Western Cape.

This past weekend we saw the devastating impact of the SAPS resourcing crisis when a total of 55 people were murdered in the Province with 50 of these murders occurring in the Cape Town Metro.

Earlier today I joined the City of Cape Town Metro Police in Hanover Park to witness the excellent work they are doing in responding to gang violence. As we arrived gun shots went off and the Metro Police were on site within 2 minutes recovering live ammunition and empty shells from the shooting. Speaking to a resident clutching her grandchild she said that SAPS is not visible. She wanted to know why it is that the Metro Police is always first to respond, but not SAPS. In fact, I saw more Police vans parked outside this precinct this afternoon than I did this morning in Hanover Park.

The Minister believes he is winning the war on crime, the residents of Hanover Park beg to differ.

Perhaps the Minister and I will agree on this one point, that the crime situation in the Western Cape has reached crisis proportions. Why else would he have convened an emergency meeting with the Justice Cluster earlier this week.

The question though is why the Minister waited for a blood bath in order to convene this emergency meeting and why the Minister continues to ignore the Western Cape governments repeated reasonable appeals for increased police officers and more support from SAPS.

Against the backdrop of the resourcing crisis in SAPS, the President has committed to halving violent crime within ten years.

When I challenged the President to tell us what plans he had to support his lofty ambition, the ANC lectured the opposition on parliamentary process saying that we will see the details in the Annual Performance Plans of the departments.

Surprise, surprise we are today still without plans that actually speak to the Presidential promise.

In fact the SAPS Annual Performance Plan, presented to the committee last week, is in no way calibrated to deliver on the President's commitment.

For example, the SAPS APP refers to a reduction in serious crimes by 2% per year over the medium term. This will only reduce the number of reported cases of serious crimes by approximately 100 000 cases

When I challenged SAPS on this point, I was told that addendums with new targets would be added to the APP and presented to the Minister before the end of the month.

We are here tonight to debate the budget and the plans that give effect to this budget, yet the committee has not been provided with the full picture.

The DA will not allow this committee to be turned into a rubber stamp for the Minister. We will fight to ensure that the committee finds its teeth and that when it bites it bites hard.

To this end, the DA will be advancing solutions to tackle crime and build an honest and professional police service during this 6th Parliament.

As a start we will be advocating for quarterly joint committee meetings of the Justice Cluster in order to promote the establishment of a modern and fully integrated criminal justice system by the end of this 6th Parliament.

We will also be proposing biannual Joint Committee meetings of the Economic Cluster together with Police so that we can address the impact crime is having on our economy, in particular the recent attacks on our logistics sector which have undermined our transport economy.

In our efforts to root out corruption in the SAPS the DA last week requested the Chairperson to summon the Minister to the committee before the end of this month so that the committee may interrogate the Minister on his chosen candidate to fill the critical vacancy at the head of IPID.

Chairperson, within the existing SAPS budget we find the distorted and wasteful resourcing priorities of the ANC government in the bloated VIP Protection budget.

By way of example, in 2018/19 the SAPS budget catered for a ratio of 81 VIP Officers to 1 VIP.

Allow me to repeat this: 81 VIP Officers to 1 VIP!

It is no wonder why police resourcing in the Western Cape is not a priority for the Minister, he is too busy protecting his comrades to worry about the people of Philippi, Hanover Park and Lavender Hill who suffer policing ratios from as high as 1 police officer to 600 people.

Tomorrow, in order to address the resourcing crisis in the SAPS, my colleagues in the Appropriations Committee will propose that the bloated and wasteful VIP protection budget of R3.1 Billion be slashed to R1.1 Billion with the savings being directed as follows:

1. An additional R300 Million be allocated to investigations in the IPID Vote so that we can root out corruption in SAPS
2. To ensure effective rural policing, an additional allocation of R500 Million be allocated to the Visible Policing budget for the purpose of capacitating the rural reservists to support SAPS in tackling rural safety.
3. Lastly, we will propose that an allocation of R1.2 Billion be made to the Visible Policing budget to further the creation, and training, of specialised units within SAPS

Chairperson, we know that SAPS is critically under resourced. We know that the current plans and budget do not speak to halving violent crime. We know where the high crime weight stations are across the country and we know what needs to be done.

It is time to bring Pretoria to the people!

It is time to decentralise SAPS by provincializing policing so that Provincial Commissioners and Station Commanders can have more authority to act decisively and redeploy resources in a targeted manner without interference from Pretoria.

The time for planning is over.

The time for action is now!